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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001192

SIPDIS

OFFICIAL INFORMAL

FOR KFITZGIBBON

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SUBJECT: POTENTIAL FOR VIOLENCE IN KANO RISING

REF: A) ABUJA B) ABUJA 0762 C) ABUJA 1644 D) ABUJA 1635

Classified by DCM Tim Andrews for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary: In a series of meetings held in Kano May 10-12, Government officials, religious leaders, academics and journalists repeatedly stressed to Poloff the "dangerous" level of tension between Kano's Hausa-Fulani and large immigrant Igbo and Yoruba population. Communal relations there appear to have deteriorated since the Ambassador's visit in March, largely because of the continued perception among Kano's Hausa majority that Lagos State Government is unwilling to prosecute OPC members responsible for the killing of Hausas in the Ajegunle incident last October (Ref. C). The activities of Shari'a vigilante groups have also increased apprehension among Southerners. Leaders on all sides are concerned, and are warning of the potential for a bloody inter-ethnic conflict in the city if something is not done to lessen the tension. The Obasanjo Administration's reluctance to go beyond immediate intervention in times of crisis has not helped to alleviate those concerns. If the Lagos and Kano Governors do not begin to coordinate their efforts, and take at least some steps towards reconciliation, another round of violence may be difficult to avoid. End Summary.

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Storm Clouds  
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12. (C) The Chairman of the Kano chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria, Reverend G.A. Ojo, is pastor of the First Baptist Church, the largest Yoruba church in Kano. Ojo said that his church was being reduced to an all-male membership, as the Yoruba in Kano were sending their families back South. He said that tensions between Kano's Hausa majority and its Southern population had risen "significantly." Ojo praised the efforts of Governor Kwankwaso, the Emir of Kano, the police and Muslim religious leaders for preventing reprisals by Kano's Hausa against their Yoruba neighbors following the Ajegunle incident last October, in which hundreds of Hausas--largely from Kano--were killed in a Lagos suburb.

13. (C) Ojo said that Kano's long-resident Southern minority, which numbers in the range of half a million people, was very aware of the historical ebb and flow of inter-ethnic violence in Kano. That collective memory extends to the pogrom against Igbos in Kano in 1966--itself a reaction to the coup attempt in which mostly Igbo officers killed Northern Premier Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier Tafawa Balewa and other Nigerian leaders. By some estimates, up to 30,000 thousands Igbo and Yoruba were thought to have been killed in that incident, which was a major precipitating factor in the Biafran secession. Ojo commented that "everyone" was aware that tensions were particularly high at the moment, and that any of several incidents--in Kano or Lagos--could spark a major episode of inter-ethnic violence. Ojo added that the Igbos in Sabon Gari were all armed, and implied that the Yorubas were as well. He said that a direct attack against Sabon Gari--a densely-populated rectangular enclave approximately 2.5 by one kilometers--would be unlikely because it is essentially an "armed camp." Ojo predicted that the violence would probably be focused on the substantial number of Igbo and Yoruba living elsewhere in the city.

14. (C) Ojo asserted that while the Shari'a issue in Kano did not help matters, Christian leaders had confidence in the Government's intentions not to allow Shari'a to affect their population. Their primary concern, he said, was with crime and mob violence. He added that an action by Shari'a enforcers, for example, could provide an opportunity for

Kano's "Yandabas" (gangs of criminally inclined, unemployed youth) to set off unrest in order to begin looting. Ojo said that Kano's Hausas were "furious" over the failure of Lagos State to prosecute Frederic Fashehun (leader of the OPC) and other OPC members for their perceived involvement in the Ajegunle incident. He complained bitterly about the actions of the OPC in Lagos and Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu: "Either they do not know that what they do puts us at risk, or they do not care. But we have no control over them. We can only sit and wait."

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The National Police  
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15. (C) Deputy Commissioner of Police, Emmanuel Ezozue, an Igbo, confirmed that Kano's security situation had become "dangerous." He said that preventing reprisal violence after Ajegunle was a significant accomplishment, but added that anger in the Hausa community over that incident had not dissipated in the intervening seven months. If anything, he said, it was increasing because of a perceived lack of justice in Lagos and the severely depressed economy in Kano. Ezozue said, "My own brother left Kano for Abuja. It's just too dangerous." Asked whether Kano's police would be able to stop the unrest feared by many, the Deputy Commissioner said flatly, "No. There are too many of them, and not enough police."

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The Governor  
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16. (C) Governor Kwankwaso discussed at length the recent Hisbah enforcement action against hotels that continue to serve alcohol in the State (Ref. A). He said that while he had arrested those involved in the burning of the Igbo-owned Henzina Hotel, he could not try them at this point because of the potential reaction by Shari'a supporters. Kwankwaso said that Kano's Hausa majority, independent of the Shari'a question, continued to be outraged by the failure to prosecute any of the organizers or perpetrators of the violence in Ajegunle. He was especially critical of Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu: "The man should have kept Fashehun under house arrest in his hotel, a house, anywhere, for six months so people up here would calm down. Letting him go after one week did not help me manage the situation here."

17. (C) Kwankwaso said that he had requested but not received any help from the Obasanjo Administration on how to handle the increasingly precarious security situation in Kano. In the immediate aftermath of the Ajegunle violence, delegations sent by the Federal Government fanned out across the nation--including Kano--to preach peace and restraint. Clearly frustrated with the lack of current support from Abuja in addressing the causes of the violence, Kwankwaso declaimed: "Kano is the most difficult city in Nigeria to manage! It is the second largest in the country, and most of its people are poor, even by our standards. Lagos has bankers, lawyers, a middle class, in addition to its poor. I have a few rich Alhajis--the rest are nail clippers and people selling sugar-cane on the streets." Acknowledging the economic roots of recurring unrest in Kano, Kwankwaso added, "A hungry man is an angry man. And many people in Kano are hungry." (Note: Violent crime in Lagos is much worse, viewed in per capita terms, than Kano, so the Governor's assertion is not entirely accurate. End Note.)

18. (C) Kwankwaso re-iterated that many of Kano's poor Hausas were focusing much of their anger on the perceived injustice against their kinsmen in the Ajegunle incident and its aftermath. He said that immediate revenge would have dissipated the collective anger generated by that incident. Kwankwaso added that he had been only half successful in preventing a recurrence of violence: while reprisals for Ajegunle were averted, the anger it generated remains. According to Kwankwaso, the desire for vengeance appeared to be growing.

19. (C) Consul General Lagos has reported to us that the commission convened to study the causes of the Ajegunle riots is nearing the completion of its report. It appears that the Commission may adopt the conspiracy theory that the violence was instigated by a prominent Northerner to de-stabilize the country, and therefor conclude that the Hausas in the Ajegunle market riot started the violence and essentially provoked the conflict that led to their own deaths. While it is difficult to determine with absolute certainty all that happened in Ajegunle, as far as Northerners are concerned,

the bare facts of the incident speak for themselves: a large number of the non-indigene Hausa minority were killed by a majority population of Southerners, which suggests the simpler explanation of bitter, long-standing grievances boiling over, as they often do in Nigeria, with the minority ethnic group taking the lion's share of the casualties. Not surprisingly, Hausas and Yorubas have divergent perspectives on those events, and on the Odu'a Peoples' Congress (OPC), that are not easily reconciled. The OPC appears to be viewed by Lagos State government as a legitimate civilian cultural and law enforcement organization, whose responses can be sometimes excessive. It is generally viewed in the North as a criminal, para-military organization that enjoys the tacit support of Governor Tinubu and his Attorney General, and took the lead in the unrest that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Hausas.

10. (C) Acting in the ad-hoc manner of previous heads of state, President Obasanjo is reluctant to address this situation beyond traditional responses to immediate violence--police and army repression. He risks alienating what Yoruba base he has if he aggressively pursues the OPC. He is already viewed by much of the Northern leadership as having "gone ethnic." In the eyes of Northerners, neither Minister of Justice Bola Ige nor Governor Tinubu appear interested in prosecuting criminal acts by OPC members either. Although there are many Northerners serving in the Obasanjo Administration, including senior conservatives who remain loyal to his government, many other Hausas believe that President Obasanjo is representing Yoruba--rather than national--interests. Barring intervention by the Executive, the problem is left to the Governors, the police, and--if there is a truly serious outbreak of inter-communal violence--the military to solve.

11. Comment: Truth can remain highly elusive in any discussion across ethnic lines about seminal historical events in Nigeria. Each of the three major ethnic groups tailors--or invents--facts to support its own long-standing story of victimization by the others, which usually and conveniently elides over that group's role as victimizer. These stories color even the most basic perceptions, and provide the rationale for occasionally devastating violence against members of the perceived "aggressor" ethnic group, thereby creating new victims ad nauseam. Rightly or wrongly, Kano's Hausas believe that their people were victimized by the OPC in Lagos, and that both the Lagos State and Federal Governments have failed to arrest and to prosecute the perpetrators. By all accounts, due to poverty, prejudice, familial ties and anger at perceived injustice, many Hausas in Kano appear poised to seek vengeance against their Yoruba neighbors with fairly slight provocation. Once violence of that nature commences, regardless of the justification, the Igbos are usually also attacked. This is partly because they are Southerners, but primarily because their homes and businesses are targets of opportunity for looting by participants in the violence.

12. Comment Continued.: There has been limited contact between Governors Tinubu and Kwankwaso, while the Mission maintains close ties with both. Encouraging co-operation on calming ethnic tensions is one option for the USG to pursue. At the least, Governor Tinubu should be made aware that releasing an inflammatory report on the Ajegunle incident in Lagos will not enhance the security of his ethnic kinsmen in Kano, to say the least. A visit to Kano by the Governor or other Lagos officials to express regret for the loss of life at Ajegunle--similar to Gov. Makarfi's "tour" of the East--might be helpful in defusing some of the tension. USAID is currently planning conflict-resolution programs which may be of use, if their resources could be partly spent on a public education campaign via radio for the largely, illiterate Northern population. We will continue to sound opinion amongst Nigerian security personnel, including NSA Aliyu Mohammed, to gauge their own level of concern, and to express our misgivings about the security situation in Kano. End Comment.  
Andrews